

A Brief Historical Sketch of
Saint John's Congregation
("the little German church") of Creston, Iowa.

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(Pastor of St. John's 2006 - 2016)



St John's United Church of Christ during Advent of 2013.

The congregation that would one day become known as Saint John's United Church of Christ was established on February 4, 1878, under the leadership of the Rev. C.F.W. Brandt of the Missouri Synod. Nine families formerly adopted the constitution that established Saint John's German Evangelical Lutheran Church U.A.C.: Adolf Dunst, Carl Petznick, William Hagedorn, Albert Dunst, Michael Elftmann, Carl Vetterick, Gustav Lenz, William Strey and Carl Fischer. A church building was erected and a dedication ceremony was conducted on August 11, 1878. (U.A.C. stands for "unaltered Augsburg Confession," referring to the document that was first presented by German rulers at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles. It is one of the most important documents of the Lutheran Reformation.)

In the words that graced the 50th anniversary booklet of St John's, "It ... soon became evident that under the prevailing circumstances no progress could be made." On April 21, 1879 the first constitution was dissolved, and with the help of the Rev. Kirchoff of Burlington (a member of the Evangelical Synod of North America) a new constitution was adopted, and the church became Saint John's German Evangelical Church. Seventeen families signed the new constitution, and Henry Detering was chosen as the first president of the church board.

By the fall of 1879 a parsonage with a schoolroom had been built, and on September 28 of that year Rev. C.J. Peters was called as the first pastor of St John's. He began his pastorate on November 9.

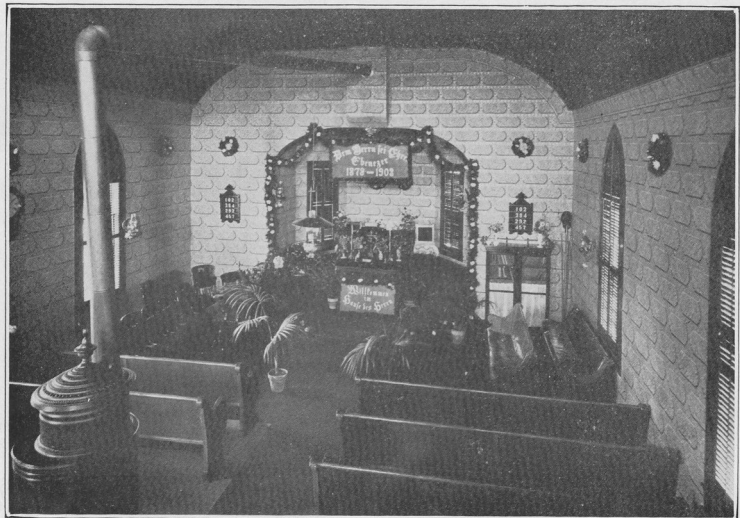
On March 2, 1880 the Ladies Aid (now the Women's Fellowship) was organized with 18 members. By October of that year they had purchased a reed organ for the

church "to improve the singing." (Evangelical Lutheran Churches U.A.C. did not sing, but chanted their services. So it is doubtful that an organ would have been needed prior to the spring of 1879.)

The Ladies Aid were also responsible for purchasing the adjoining lot to the south of the church for the construction of a school that was "dedicated [on April 16, 1882] to the instruction of the coming generation in the faith of the fathers and the propagation of the German language."

The Rev. Peters resigned as pastor at the beginning of 1883, and was succeeded by the Rev. F.C. Krueger. It was under Rev. Krueger that the church was rebuilt in 1888 and the bell tower was added. In January of 1889 Rev. Krueger resigned and a call was extended to Rev. F. Rashe who began his pastorate in April of that year. 1890 saw the parsonage remodeled and the next year saw the first attempt to establish a Young People's Society.

Rev. Rasche left St John's in 1895 and the Rev. P. Speidel began his pastorate in May of that year. 1896 saw a new reed organ purchased for the church (the old one being donated to the school). In January of 1898, the Rev. A. Koehler began his five year pastorate at St John's. He would be succeeded by the Rev. Phillipp Blaufuss in 1903.



INTERIOR OF CHURCH, 1903

On October 11, 1903 a 25th anniversary celebration was held, "at which time the new and most comfortable seats were for the first time filled to capacity." A new parsonage was built in place of the old one in 1907.

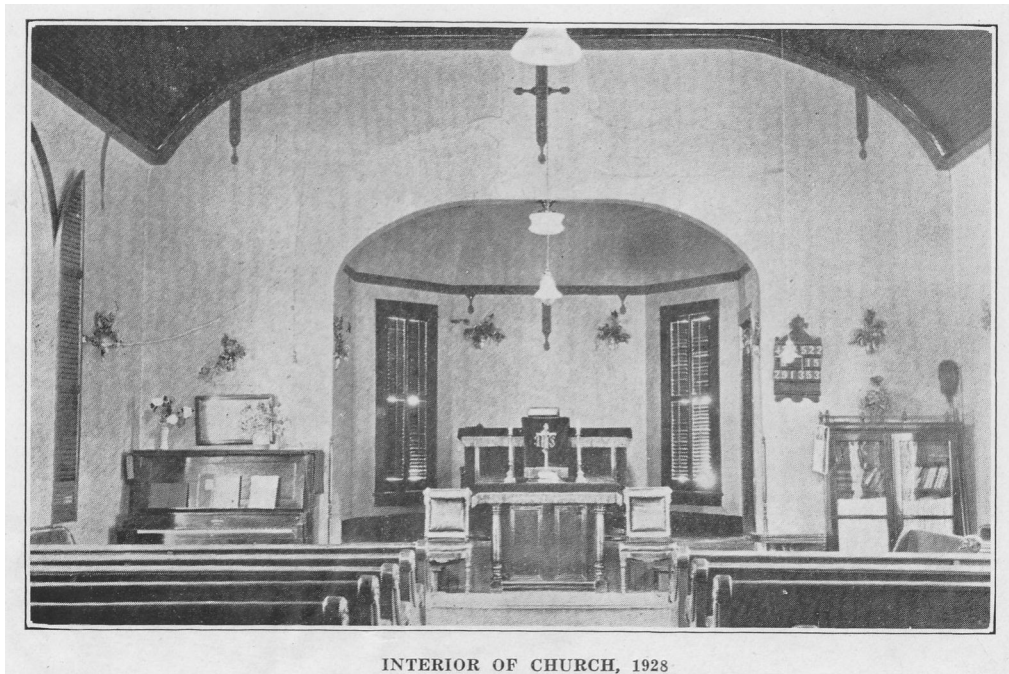
A second Young People's Society was organized on April 21, 1912, with 36 members, but would only be active until 1916.

In 1915, the Rev. Blaufuss resigned and was succeeded by the Rev. Ernst Birkner in July of 1915. (His son, Siegfried Birkner, would be the first young person from St John's to enter the ministry.) It would be under Rev. Birkner that English language services would begin. Until this time, all services were conducted in German. (A vote was taken at the January 1916 annual meeting to have English language worship services one evening a month. By then, the first World War was underway in Europe.)

In 1922, the congregation voted that full membership would be bestowed on those who had been confirmed in the church and had reached the age of 21. This has remained unchanged.

In October of 1925 a meeting was held that decided that every second Sunday morning, the worship service would be in English. In 1927, the constitution of the church was revised and printed, for the first time, in both English and German.

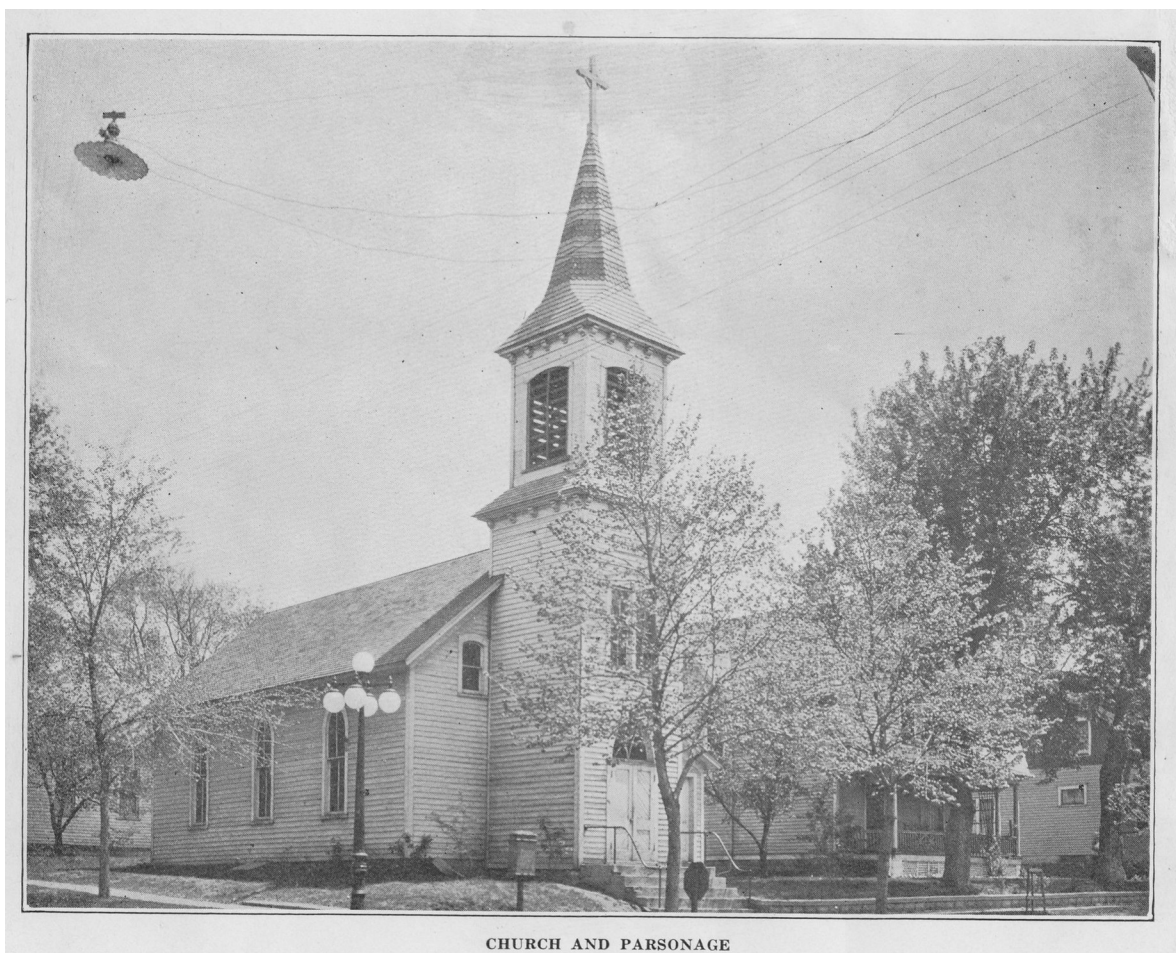
1928 saw the 50th anniversary celebration of St John's. (A wonderful booklet was published to commemorate the event, and I have quoted heavily from it.) It is recorded that at the time, there were 95 voting members of the church, and "some" 30 junior members. In the first 50 years of the congregation's life, 648



INTERIOR OF CHURCH, 1928

baptisms were conducted, 320 people were confirmed, 185 couples were married, and 300 "were laid to rest". It was also stated that 6,395 had "received holy communion" in the first 50 years of the church. And Henry Detering, who had been chosen as the first president of St John's in 1879, was still the president. (In July of 1926, the congregation honored him with the lifelong title "Honorary President".) He would pass away in June of 1937.

In 1932, the school was converted into a parish hall. 1935 saw the merging of the Evangelical Synod with the Reformed Church on June 26. At that time, the congregation became known as St John's Evangelical and Reformed Church. But this name would become St John's United Church of Christ, when in 1961 the Evangelical and Reformed Churches became a part of the United Church of Christ.



CHURCH AND PARSONAGE

Undated photo of St John's and parsonage. Probably in early 1940's.

1938 saw the Rev. Gustav Bratzel called to become our pastor. He assumed his duties on August 30, 1938, and served the church faithfully for nearly 40 years until his passing in 1974.

In 1940, it was decided to remodel the entire church with the goal being "debt free in '43". New chancel furniture was purchased, the stained glass windows were installed, and the sanctuary was re-plastered and refinished. The way the inside of the church looks now is thanks to this 1941 remodel.

The exterior of the church was tackled in 1942. And during the 65th anniversary celebration in 1943, the note

was burned. 1943 also saw German language services discontinued at St John's.



The interior of St John's in August 1942.

1947 saw the purchase of a new Wurlitzer organ with chimes that is still being used every Sunday. 1949 saw the double garage built. 1953 saw concrete steps laid in the front of the church, a redecoration of the parish hall and new pews installed. Ten years later, the church yard was landscaped with fifteen evergreen trees.

In 1974, Rev. Bratzel, "the dean of Creston ministers", who had served the congregation since 1938, passed away at the age of 88. Services were held at 1pm on Monday, June 10 at the church. The Rev. Dale Hempen, then president of the Creston Ministerial Alliance, asked all Creston churches to toll their bells 12:30pm to 1:00pm. At 1pm, a whistle was blown downtown, and the entire community paused "in

recognition of his long service to his church and community." (*Creston News Advertiser*)



The Rev & Mrs Bratzel's marker at Graceland Cemetery in Creston.

The late 1970's and 1980's were tough times for St. John's. By 1989, it was decided that part-time ministers would have to serve the church. But the church continued to look forward. 1991 saw new carpet and flooring installed in the parish hall, and a ramp was built for the church. 1993 saw the installation of air conditioning in the parish hall. A year later, new roofs were put on the church and parsonage. 1996 saw the conversion of the north vestry into a pastor's study and air conditioning installed in the church. 1998 saw a new sound system installed in the church, and in 2000 a new furnace was installed.

In the new millennium, the church continued to modernize. The bell tower was replaced in 2002, and the electrical wiring in the sanctuary was redone. In 2003, the sanctuary walls were refinished and painted.

In 2006, a partnership was entered into with the Cromwell Congregational United Church of Christ, and together the Rev. Daniel J. Moore was called to be the pastor that year. (This partnership would end in January of 2016.) Looking to the direction of modern media, a church web page, blog and even a Twitter feed (Not to mention digital audio recordings of sermons.) were soon

available on the Internet. But some things remain the same. We still hold soup suppers every few months, and people come from miles around for a bowl of our ham and bean soup.

During Lent of 2011, Rev. Moore and a group from the church traveled to the Holy Land where they celebrated communion at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, and four members of St. John's reaffirmed their baptism in the Jordan River.

2012 saw the retirement of our piano player, Marjorie Jessen, after nearly 80 years of service to the church. The church also undertook some important capital improvements to the building and the parish house. The cross on the steeple was taken down and repaired, the church roof was re-shingled, and the front doors of the church were repaired.

To celebrate these improvements, on August 11, 2013 the congregation celebrated the 135th anniversary of the dedication of the church building with a special service that included a hymn that Rev. Moore had written lyrics for entitled Faith of *Our Fathers, Mother Too*. The church was full with many former members in attendance that Sunday. After worship, a lunch was held in the parish hall.

On August 21, 2016, St John's celebrated "Pastor Dan's" ten years of ministry to the church. In addition, the service saw the baptism of P.J. Edward Louis Sullivan. In attendance was P.J.'s great-great grandmother Fern Holliday, who has been a stalwart of St John's for decades.

Called Ministers of St John's since 1878

Rev. C.F.W. Bradt	1878 (organizing pastor)
Rev. C.J. Peters	1879-1883
Rev. F.C. Krueger	1883-1889
Rev. F. Rasche	1889-1895
Rev. P. Speidel	1895-1898
Rev. A. Koehler	1898-1903
Rev. P. Blaufuss	1903-1915
Rev. J.E. Birkner	1915-1931
Rev. A.L. Schieler	1931-1935
Rev. P. Kasper	1936-1938
Rev. G.G. Bratzel	1938-1974
Ed Rohrig	1974-1978
Russell Hart	1978-1981
Rev. G. Campbell	1981-1989
John Moline	1989-1990
Randall Teeuwen	1991
Rev. Joyce Basler	1993-1998
Barbara Zimmermann	1998-2002 (licensed)
Mairi Winslow	2002 (licensed)
Rev. Delores Doench	2002-2006
Rev. Daniel Moore	2006-2016



St John's alter on Easter morning in 2016.

If you discover an error in this booklet, please let Rev Dan Moore know and it will be corrected in future revisions.

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Our Stained Glass Windows

*This is a complete list of the seventeen stained glass windows
within St John's church.*

Upper Left, West wall from left (South) to right (North):

- Young People's / League
- Petznick
- Birkner
- Sunday School

Above entryway (West end):

- St John's Brotherhood / 1941 (The window, facing outside, reads "St John's / Evangelical and Reformed / Church.")

North wall from left (West) to right (East):

- A Memorial To Man's Faith In God / The A Haag Family
- In Memory of / Mr and Mrs William Strey and / Mr and Mrs August Strey
- Mr and Mrs August Doge
- (above piano) In Memory of / Mr and Mrs Albert Dunst

South wall from left (East) to right (West):

- (above organ) Mr and Mrs Wm Ohlschlager
- In Memory of / Mr and Mrs Henry Detering
- In Memory of / Mr and Mrs Frank E Pontow
- Mr and Mrs Henry Heessel

North side sacristy from left (West) to right (East):

- Mr and Mrs Henry Glau
- In Memory of / Mr and Mrs Jacob Kneiding

South side sacristy from left (East) to right (West):

- To Our Young People / Have Faith and Be Loyal / Paul Bernhardt
- To Help Make Life Bright and Cheery / From / Bertha Boll

The "/" indicates a line break on the window.